The kingdom of heaven is like a beautiful farm. Each day people come to work in the fields and the orchards. Each day people milk the cows. Some people come to work at the crack of dawn and work for 10 straight hours. Some are late risers and don’t get out into the fields until 10. Some of the people don’t seem to care too much about harvesting the crop and begin their work sometime after lunch. And some people hardly work at all. They show up near the end of the afternoon, pick 10 apples from the lowest branches of the trees and call it quits.

The owner of the farm is very generous. At the end of each day the farmer pays everyone the same amount: $200. $200 is generous pay for a day of farm work. $200 is a ridiculous amount for someone who has only worked four or five hours. But it seems to make no sense at all to pay someone $200 for picking 10 apples. But the kingdom of heaven is not about fairness. The kingdom of heaven is about generosity. The one in charge of the kingdom is extremely generous to every person.

The kingdom of heaven is like a group of people who are wandering through the wilderness. The wilderness is a scary place. The people think they are going to run out of food. They are afraid. They begin to complain and argue one night after they have eaten the last of their provisions.

But in the morning the people wake up and discover that the ground is covered with food. At first they do not recognize what it is. They are surrounded by food, but they do not understand that they can eat it. The food is called manna. The word manna means “What is it?” Eventually the people realize that the manna is good to eat.

The only problem with manna is that it must be eaten when it is fresh, That is not a serious problem because every day there is more manna on the ground. As the people continue their journey through the wilderness they find manna to eat every day. It is not the sort of food they are familiar with. It is not the sort of food the people would choose. But the kingdom of heaven is not about what we would choose. The kingdom of heaven is not about what we are familiar with. The kingdom of heaven is about freshness and about God’s new creation.

The kingdom of heaven is not just in the past, when the children of Israel were wandering through the desert. The kingdom of heaven is not just in the future. The kingdom of heaven is right here, today.

The kingdom of heaven is like a very old man or a very old woman. Spend some time with a very old man or a very old woman and you will know what I mean. The very old man might not be able to walk any more, but after a little while you realize that doesn’t make much difference. The very old woman might not be able to see anymore, but after a little while you realize that doesn’t make much difference.

You will see the kingdom of heaven in the very old man when you talk with him and realize he is listening carefully to what you are saying. You will see the kingdom of heaven in the very old woman when you tell her about something that is troubling you and she tells
you that God has given you enough strength to face the challenge. The kingdom of heaven is not about our strength. The kingdom of heaven is about listening to another person.

The kingdom of heaven is like a six month old baby. Spend some time taking care of a baby and you will know what I mean. Spend some time looking into the baby’s eyes and the baby will look at you. Hold the baby’s hand. Eventually the baby will hold your hand too. The baby is completely helpless. The baby cannot walk, it cannot feed itself. But God has given a powerful gift to the little baby: it is the gift of the mind, the gift of thinking and remembering and understanding. God has given another powerful gift to the little baby: it is the gift of love, it is the desire to be connected to other people. The six month old baby cannot do much but it can do the most important things. The little baby can think and remember and understand. The little baby has the desire to be connected with other people. The little baby can start a new creation called love.

The kingdom of heaven is like a six month old baby because the kingdom of heaven is not about doing everything for ourselves; the kingdom of heaven is about doing the most important things. The most important things we do happen in our hearts and in our minds.

You do not have to be a little baby or an old man or an old woman to live in the abundance of God’s kingdom. God has given you the most generous gift: it is the gift of your mind. It is your ability to think and create and remember.

Most of our lives we are like the people of Israel wandering through the desert. We journey long distances in the wilderness. We run as fast as our legs will carry us, looking for treasure. We look for treasure in all of the wrong places. We spend a lot of time looking at our lives, asking, “Where is it? Where is the treasure?” Like the people of Israel looking at the manna we ask, “What is it? What is the treasure?”

The treasure is underneath your hat. The treasure is your mind. The treasure is the gift of thinking and remembering and creating. God has given you this gift.

You do not have to live in a special time or place to live in the abundance of God’s kingdom. It doesn’t make any difference that we are not walking next to Moses, that we are not walking next to Jesus. God has given you the most powerful gift: it is the gift of your heart. It is the gift of loving other people. It is the gift of the desire to be connected with others.

Most of our lives we complain and argue. We argue like the workers in the parable of the vineyard. We complain that we have worked hard. We complain that others have hardly worked at all. We argue with each other and we tell ourselves that life is not fair.

We are right about that; life is not fair. Each one of us has been given the most powerful gift: the ability to love. Some of us have worked hard along the way and some of us have hardly worked at all. Regardless of whether or not we have worked, each one of us has received a gift that is far greater than anything we could have earned.